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## summary

This column discusses ways that a high school strength coach can have a positive influence on his or her school's athletic program. Along with strength, conditioning, and athletic-enhancement responsibilities, a strength coach can add value to his or her position by taking on the mental and motivational issues that are often neglected components in the development of the high school athlete.

Strength coaches at the high school level have the unique ability to work with athletes all year long and, as a result, get to know them on a different level than is often possible for the sport coach. The strength coach is not responsible for determining playing time and is seen as an ally who is there to make the athletes better, as well as a resource to help them achieve their goals.

# The Expanded Role of the High School Strength Coach: Becoming a More Valuable Asset to Your Athletic Program

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As a neutral source, the strength coach often can see a situation in a way that the sport coach, who is too close to it, cannot. In order to expand the value of the strength coach's position, you need to look beyond strength and conditioning responsibilities and find ways to incorporate both the mental and physical components of sport. Below I list 7 areas of focus that will add value to the strength coach position within the athletic department.

## Become a Counselor/Mentor to the Athletes

The most important way to gain the respect of your athletes is to show them you care. When you have taken the time to get to know the athletes on an individual basis, they will do anything you ask them to do. Working with high school students should be more about affecting lives than winning championships. The amount of time you spend with your athletes and the environment in which you work serve as a natural lead-in to a more influential relationship.

## Teach the Basics of Sport Psychology to the Athletes and Coaches

Many coaches talk about the importance of the mental aspects of sport, but

get too caught up in the strategy and technique of their sports to fit in the time necessary to address the mental components. As a strength coach, you are in a natural position to fill that void. There are a number of good sport psychology books that are directed at the coach and athlete and do not require a sport psychology degree to understand.

## Suggested Readings

- *Ready to Play: Mental Training for Student Athletes* by Ron Chamberlain.
- *Coaching the Mental Game: Leadership Philosophies and Strategies for Peak Performance in Sports and Everyday Life* by H.A. Dorfman.
- *Sports Slump Busting: 10 Steps to Mental Toughness and Peak Performance* by Alan S. Goldberg.
- *In Pursuit of Excellence: How to Win in Sport and Life Through Mental Training* by Terry Orlick.
- *The Sport Psych Handbook: A Complete Guide to Today's Best Mental Training Techniques* by Shane Murphy.

## Develop Leadership Teams and Leadership Training

Leadership skills are an important part of any type of organization, but

they are especially important when dealing with sport teams. We as coaches often assume that our athletes know more about how to lead than they actually do. By developing leadership training and picking leadership teams, you can teach your athletes valuable skills that they can use in their sport, in their school, and in their future endeavors. Leadership can be taught.

### **Suggested Readings**

- *The Team Captain's Leadership Manual: The Complete Guide to Developing Team Leaders Whom Coaches Respect and Teammates Trust* by Jeff Janssen.
- *Coaching Your Kids to Be Leaders: The Keys to Unlocking Their Potential* by Pat Williams.

### **Develop Motivational Ideas for Teams**

A catalyst for team bonding often is initiated with the use of team slogans and the development of traditions.

### **Suggested Reading**

- *101 Positive Athletic Traditions: Building Positive Team Legacies* by Bruce Eamon Brown.

### **Teach Character Development Through Weekly Themes**

Collecting quotes, phrases, and thoughts concerning attributes such as discipline, character, effort, and pride and then putting them together as weekly themes or thoughts for the day will allow you to integrate character development into the athletic program.

### **Suggested Readings**

- *1001 Motivational Messages and Quotes for Athletes: Teaching Character Through Sport* by Bruce Eamon Brown.
- *Another 1001 Motivational Messages and Quotes* by Bruce Eamon Brown.
- *The Choice is Yours* by John C. Maxwell.

### **Help Develop Teamwork by Assessing Team-Building Strengths and Weaknesses**

As a neutral source, the strength coach can often give surveys and analyze feedback to help teams understand weaknesses that may be preventing them from reaching their potential. Areas such as acceptance of roles, communication, dealing with adversity, and belief in the coaching staff are crucial to individual and team athletic success.

### **Suggested Reading**

- *Championship Team Building: What Every Coach Needs To Know To Build a Motivated, Committed & Cohesive Team* by Jeff Janssen.

### **Pass on Best Practices and Positive Philosophies From One Team and Coach to Another**

Look for ideas within your own athletic program that can be passed from one sport to another. Read about great coaches and great programs, and look for ideas that can be applied to your school. As a strength coach, you can be a source of ideas that your sport team coaches can use to improve their effectiveness.

### **Suggested Readings**

- *Creative Coaching: New Ways to Maximize Athlete and Team Potential in All Sports* by Jerry Lynch.
- *The Seven Secrets of Successful Coaches: How to Unlock and Unleash Your Team's Full Potential* by Jeff Janssen and Greg Dale.

We are always encouraging our athletes to improve. As strength coaches, we need to look outside the box and find ways to add value to our position and more avenues to impact the athletes with whom we are working.

**Kevin Vanderbush** is in his 22nd year as the strength and conditioning coach, as well as the advanced weight training instructor, for all 20 boys and girls sport teams at Ben Davis High School in Indianapolis, Indiana.

In any high school, there is a vital place for a certified strength and conditioning specialist (CSCS) in all athletic programs. The CSCS will have the potential to impact upon athletic performance in a whole host of ways and in a variety of domains. However, in many cases the coach is under-used and the role limited merely to the weight room. It offers a revolutionary program to breaking the patterns of self-defeating behavior that keep us from achieving our goals and reaching our fullest potential, and describes how to replace them with a principle-focused approach to problem-solving. View. Show abstract. The Expanded Role of the High School Strength Coach: Becoming a More Valuable Asset to Your Athletic January 2006 Strength and Conditioning Journal. Kevin Vanderbush. Coaching Roles and Skills. The United Kingdom Coaching Strategy describes the role of the sports coach as one that "enables the athlete to achieve levels of performance to the degree that may not have been possible if left to his/her endeavours". Dyson speaking to the 19th session of the International Olympic Academy, Greece 1979, widened the horizon when he said that "the wise coach develops not only the fullest physical potential in his charges but also those capacities and habits of mind and body which will enrich and ennoble their later years". Most athletes are highly motivated, and therefore the task is to maintain that motivation and to generate excitement and enthusiasm. Many strength coaches also attend graduate school to seek a master's degree since some jobs strongly encourage applicants to have an advanced degree. Coursework includes a heavy dose of science, and if that scares you, take a deep breath. How do you go from the bottom of the ladder to becoming a strength coach for a professional sports team? Volunteering!!! Nobody wants to hear it, but you must be willing to work for free. I see my role as a strength coach as more than just telling them to lift weights. These are pretty young guys and many do not have strong guidance. They have never been asked to grow up, so I like to talk to them about the importance of developing a daily routine and leadership. Great teams understand that none of what we do is really about basketball.